

Chapter 22

MARRIAGE IN HUNZA

THE Burusho population of Hunza is divided into four major ⁶¹⁴clans, centred in Báltít, and several minor clans scattered over ⁶²¹other villages. Aliábád, being a "new settlement," contained ⁵⁸²amongst its two hundred houses representatives of almost all the clans. Marriage outside the race is rare, but (as I have already said) exogamous marriage between the clans is the rule.

On the whole the Burusho cling to their settlements along ³⁶¹the eight or nine-mile stretch of river below Áltít (two or ⁵⁶³three miles up-river of Báltít), at a height of 6,000 to 8,000 feet above sea-level. They are not eager to colonize higher-lying districts, for they say their womenfolk refuse to live where the apricot will not ripen. If this is so the women show ^[263]sound sense, for the dried apricot is one of their staple foods and almost their only source of sugar. The favourite winter breakfast is a hot porridge of these *batéring*. It thus happens that the higher river-stretches above Báltít are mainly settled (if at all) by Wakhi immigrants from Afghanistan. These are a quiet, peaceable folk, markedly less intelligent than the Burusho, loyal subjects of the Mir, well content with their good pasturages and crops of barley and not missing the wheat and the apricot to which they are unaccustomed. A few Burusho colonies are scattered among the Wakhi ones, but, though friendly relations exist, the two learn little of each other's language; and intermarriage, though it would not be taboo, is very rare.

Similarly a couple of the lower Hunza villages are in- ⁵⁶³habited by Shins, of the same stock as the Gilgit people, but ⁵⁸²again intermarriage is the exception. We had fully expected to

WINTER AND THE "GREAT COLD"

than two cows. . . . You can work it out yourself. I'd like 237
to give our litter louts a few years' training in Hunza.

Salt is a crying need in Hunza, and while down-country rock-135
salt can be obtained on payment from Gilgit, few families can 263 ●
afford to buy. Hence in the relatively idle days of early winter
you will see parties of women and girls and boys scouring the
mountain side high up, and tasting as they go, till they find a
patch of ground that seems to have a trace of saltiness in it.
They scoop up the full of their baskets and carry this earth
home. When salt is wanted they mount a conical basket filled
with the saline earth over some receiving vessel. By pouring
water through, they get a discoloured fluid, containing heaven
alone knows what (probably a minimum of sodium chloride),
which they pour straight into the vegetable pot.

Another job which is kept for winter days is the making of 241
new fields. It is all too true that the Hunzukuts have not
enough water to serve their existing fields. But there are
optimists who cannot resist the attraction of making a new
field wherever they see a patch of ground that might with
luck be irrigated in a good year. It's a serious business tackling
a rocky bit of mountain side. You roughly plan your field and
then start hacking out a great triangular gash at the upper side.
It is full of stones and boulders which have to be removed; the
smaller ones are set aside for the revetting walls; the larger
ones are laboriously broken up with sledge-hammers (or
blasted if you can get hold of a little gunpowder); the stony
earth is carefully sifted into separate piles of varying degrees of
fineness. Then the lower supporting wall is built to the level
required, stones are thrown in for a foundation, next the
coarser earth, and the surface is dressed with the finer. Field-241
making is the only occasion on which a barrow of any kind is 493
of use. These barrows, of which in our whole time we only
saw four, are the only wheeled vehicles known in Hunza.
Whether the Hunzukuts invented them themselves or whether
someone once saw a wheelbarrow in use elsewhere and im-
ported the idea, who shall say? Anyhow, the Hunza wheel-
barrow is a delightful affair. A sort of rude ladder with four
or five rungs is made. A thick section of a tree trunk about

THE FIRST OF THE HARVEST

all thriving. The field walls looked very jolly at this season, with wild flowers of the rock-garden type growing in the crannies between the stones and fostered by the seepage from the irrigated fields above. Amongst them was a wild mint and a wild thyme, the flavouring qualities of which are known and appreciated.

On June 12th we saw some people hungrily eyeing their barley and reckoning that it would be ripe for cutting in another fifteen days. It was said to be good this year in spite of an abnormally cold, late spring. Some rain showers that we had were welcomed though they temporarily cooled the air. But as clouds and rain continued, anxiety began to be felt lest the wheat should be late and delay too long the planting of the buckwheat-on-wheat. The barley is subject to a disease called *tam*, which stripes the leaves an ugly yellow and produces a milky liquid in the ears. Few plants were attacked this year. The disease called *matel* (rust?), which makes black ears, attacks only wheat and millet, and if the cold and rain persisted it might be expected to set in. We were doubly anxious that this year's crops should be good: unselfishly for the people's sake; selfishly lest a bad year should be attributed to the maleficent influence of two crazy people learning Burushaski—though indeed these highly rational people would be unlikely to indulge any such fantastic association of ideas.

We saw some people one day collecting the under-bark from red willow trees; they use it for dyeing the leather of their native boots and skilfully chip it out from the living tree without injuring the willow.

Now that the people were really within sight of food they frankly confessed to being desperately hungry, and the strain of unremitting work—weeding, ploughing, manuring, grafting, irrigating from dawn to dusk on empty tummies—was showing in drawn, thin faces, but appeared powerless to damp their spirits or fray their tempers. It was dreadful to look on and be helpless to feed the multitude with loaves or fishes, while we lived—sparingly enough by home standards but—riotously compared with these much more deserving neighbours. We saw one day a group of men sitting pensively under a mulberry

šošo'likrē -ki.ants hf a supernatural 776
female who exists in the whirlwind
and does injury to mortals.

She is explained as a H. *čovel* or
Sh. *bal'a*.

čirpaphuše *šošo'likrē* the whirlwind
witch. The word is also used as a
term of abuse for an ugly, ill-dressed
old woman. *šošo'likrē* ju.an manoma
you have become like a Sh.

šuršu suffering from ague. — *je šuršu* 000
amaiya ba I am suffering from ague.

(Cp. Sh. *šuršu šar*, cold fever, ague.

Kho. *šuršu, šuršu*, ague).

šur' y a sour decoction made from apri- [263] •
cots and used as vinegar, especially
by Shins. Wakhis use *qurwt. šur'* is
put in *šawdo*.

(Cp. Kho. *šot*, sour as of unripe
grapes).

šutin pl. *šut'iyō* x the four big stones
surrounding the hearth in a house.

304.18. (Cp. *pferetsin*).

šofurko -mots x.

1. Bud.

2. Round button made of cloth.

(Cp. Sh. *šofurko*, with the same
meanings).

šurter a kind of mushroom, or truffle(?),

Punj. *gučchi*, Sh. *šonurter*.

(Not known to QUB. GB gives
Sh. *šur'*, mushroom. I have *šur'et*
toadstool).

šyu šyu, šyu šin etan to whistle.

(Cp. Sh. *šyu thoriki*; Kho. *šyu*
korik, to whistle).

T, TH, and T, TH.

1. *tā*, -mots x leopard. — *ta b.š* leo-
pard's skin. Cp. Prov. 13.

2. *tha* hundred, one hundred. — *hik*,
alto, iski, hanti tha 100, 200, 300, 900.

survive despite the encroachment of modern civilization?

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I go on record as saying, "Yes, she can survive but it will take good leadership, and the present ruling Mir—my friend, Mohammed Jamal Khan—is capable of this leadership, provided he is not interfered with by the powers that surround him or emanate from Karachi!"

The first detrimental factor that is crawling into Hunza at the present time, and has been for some years, is salt. Already numerous cases of goiter have appeared which did not exist before when they used their native salt.

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Travel in Hunza is restricted. In fact, at the present time no foreigner is allowed into the state without a permit and that includes Pakistanis as well. As far as I know, my friend Cec Brunton and I were the last foreigners to enter Hunza. With the political situation as it is today, I doubt if anyone else will be permitted to enter the country until the situation changes.

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The fact that China is at the present time encroaching upon India is a rather significant factor. I really can't appraise its implications because the disputed area by any calculation seems to be of little or no value. There are millions of such acres available throughout Tibet and the Himalayan cordillera as well as in the Karakorums. Therefore it must be just for aggrandizement that China is moving. If that is her aim and desire, then Hunza would be right up her alley.

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Yet it is my firm belief that China will not bother Hunza. I know the Afghans have looked with longing eyes on that part of Pakistan for some years, but they have neither the arms nor the men to successfully invade the area, although with arms from Russia and a little prodding, things could get hot in that area. How-

164 "Yes," said the doctor, "I am alarmed at the great increase in goiter cases in Hunza, especially among the younger people, where it is rampant. Also, cavities in the teeth of the people are being found regularly, whereas a few years ago tooth trouble in any form was practically unknown, judging from the information at my disposal!"

When he spoke to me he was genuinely distressed at the increased occurrence of both of these maladies.

"To what do you attribute the increase in these conditions, Doctor?" I asked.

He replied, "As yet I have been unable to lay my finger on anything specific concerning this."

262 I have been interested in Hunza for many years and
263 during this period I have devoured every available piece of literature on these fascinating people. Thus, marshalling my mental forces, I said to him, "Have any major changes taken place in the diet or living habits of the people of Hunza?"

"Not that I am positively aware of," he said meditatively.

"Where do the people of Hunza get their salt from?"
[439] I asked.

"It is usually flown in from Pindi to Gilgit and then carried up the trail to Baltit and other parts of Hunza."

I learned that it was also carried by jeep and pack animals from Rawalpindi across the Babusar Pass into Gilgit as well.

"How long has this been going on?"

[439] This the good doctor could not answer. But the Mir was close by and he said it was longer than ten years now that the salt had been imported.

"Where did you get your salt from before?" I said to the Mir.

263 "Why," he replied, "the people of Hunza have been
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mining salt from an area around Shimshal for many ²⁶³
hundreds of years." ^[317]

"Is there any difference between the salt that you import and that of Shimshal?"

"Much difference," said the Mir. "The salt that we import is pure white and very salty, whereas the salt mined in the Shimshal area was in its natural state and contained many impurities. The people prefer the imported salt because of its sharper saltier flavor."

"So it is true then," I said to the Mir, "that this aspect ^[177]
of modern civilization has crept into Hunza!"

The Mir and the doctor looked at each other and then somewhat reluctantly nodded in agreement.

Speaking somewhat forcibly, I said to both of them, "It is obvious that the imported salt is pure sodium chloride, whereas the salt that is brought down from Shimshal is something that has never been analyzed and obviously contains many minerals, so-called impurities."

Obviously the people of Hunza in the past did not know, did not care or did not feel the need to purify their salt, because even to a layman like myself, it is clear and obvious that by making a brine, the pure salt could be extracted.

Whether by error or design, this has never been practiced in Hunza.

"Does it not seem possible," I said to the doctor, ¹⁶⁴
"that the salt that was formerly used by the people of Hunza was the means of keeping goiter and dental caries away or at bay?"

"I hadn't thought of it before," replied the doctor, "but I will admit that it sounds logical and undoubtedly it is true!"

The Mir further admitted that little or no salt was being mined in Shimshal at the present time. Therefore it would seem to be indicated that the importation of

Hunza are more or less used to it. However, it does 164
cause trouble with the eyes of the natives. It also weak-
ens the lungs of some of the older women, who probably
spend most of their time indoors during the cold months
of the year.

I questioned the doctor and the Mir concerning pre- 843
natal care, but from what they told me, I could find no
provisions whatsoever made for prenatal care outside
the individual home.

The death rate at childbirth, they told me, was next 165
to zero, but the doctor also mentioned that a woman 845
would not consider going to a doctor for gynecological 757
reasons under any circumstances. She would rather die.
He also told me that before and after delivery of a 843
child, Hunzan women do not know of any rest. The 846
pregnant woman works harder and does more laborious
jobs till the last day of the term, in the belief that hard
and laborious work makes delivery easier and un-
eventful.

"But," he went on, "they are very careful in exerting
themselves during the early days of conception. After
delivery they are again up and doing again, only after
a short rest."

It seems to be obvious that the method followed by 843
the women of Hunza prior to childbirth "works" be-
cause both mother and child come out of it "unevent-
ful." When events occur at such times, it usually means
serious trouble.

He went on to tell me further that gallstones, renal 164
calculus, coronary heart disease, hypertension, valvular
lesions, myxoldeama thyrsotoxocasis, mental deficien-
cies, cancer, poliomyelitis, arthritis and diabetes are
absolutely unknown in Hunza.

From what I have seen and gathered I am worried 177
about the situation. They are now importing their sugar, 263 ●

177 their salt and soon there will be a few more items added
263 and, as more of their people go out of the country to
439 earn a living and come back to visit or retire, more of
civilization's curses will be brought back with them.

165 The doctor rather clearly indicated that infant mor-
114 tality was not as low as some writers would like us to
believe. I repeat—he made this quite clear.

164 Now I'll let you decide how it ties in with the state-
ments made by Sir Robert McCarrison: "During the
period of my association with these people I never saw
a case of asthenic dyspepsia, of gastric or duodenal
ulcer, of appendicitis, of mucous colitis, of cancer. . . .
Among these people, the abdomen oversensitive to
nerve impressions, to fatigue, anxiety, or cold was un-
known. Indeed their buoyant abdominal health has,
since my return to the West, provided a remarkable
contrast with the dyspeptic and colonic lamentations
of our highly civilized communities."

276 Smoking in general is not an addiction in Hunza. The
water-pipe or hubble-bubble is used by some of the
people, usually at gatherings or ceremonies. It is then
passed around in a wide circle, each one taking a puff
[562] or two. The women are included, but only after all the
men have finished.

Some of the citizens use snuff. It is tobacco mixed
with the ash of a plant called "sopa," which is indi-
genous to that area. They take the tobacco and the sopa
ash, put in a dash of water, stir it up and mix it into
a paste. Then they place gobs of this paste under their
lip, exactly the same as the snuff chewer does in the
West, although this practice has been dying out in the
Western world.

164 Just how much of the health of the people of Hunza
132 is due to the fact that they get a lot of sunlight? That
is a most pertinent question and one that will take a lot

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[263] There are no bees in Hunza and, consequently, no honey unless it is imported. This will probably come as a surprise to most people. I suspected this even before I reached Hunza. That is why I went in search of bees and honey in Hunza. But search and peer as I did, no bees were to be found and upon questioning I found that, though they had even tried importing them, they didn't remain or they died off.

Obviously the Hunza terrain is too tough and arduous for bees. Bees, contrary to what most people believe, like it soft. Set out a field of clover or a good sized patch of asters or other good honey-makers and bees will flock to your land, but, where you have a scattered flower here and there, the bees either won't bother or won't be able to find them.

Probably from a purely economic reason the bee finds Hunza uninviting. He probably would have to fly too far and too high to get any supply of nectar or honey and I don't think he'd make as much food as would be required to supplant the energy that was being used up. So after taking the important factors into consideration, it is clear that it is unwise for bees to live in Hunza. Even if it were possible to get a couple of colonies of bees established, it would do the Hunzan farmer no good because if he took away part of their honey, they would starve to death. A bee in most instances, where at all possible, stores more honey than he will require. He plays it secure by allowing a margin of safety. But in Hunza he'd have a hard enough time getting sufficient honey to keep him through the winter—let alone having some for the Hunzan farmer! From this it would appear that bees are not as smart or diligent as we think they are—or are they? Can they be blamed for seeking more colorful flowerier pastures?

164 proved laboratory by a qualified technician.

164 Their food is natural, simple, unsophisticated, with-
262 out any unnatural, inorganic, synthetic additives what-
soever. There is no fragmentation in the foods they eat.
They do not separate any part of the wheat when they
make flour, nor do they separate any part of the other
grains when using them.

252 Due to necessity they do not cook foods too much,
nor do they cook any food that can be eaten and en-
joyed without cooking.

Food is a serious, all prevalent problem. The few
trees that they have and that they can grow must be
protected for food, shade and timber.

However, I must truthfully admit that the reason
that the Hunzans do not cook their food is because of
the scarcity and inaccessibility to supplies of fuel.

751 Vaccination is not practiced and, as far as I know,
744 is unknown in Hunza. Pasteurization in any form is
neither practiced nor known. Chlorination is unheard
of. Fluoridation is unheard of. No coloring whatsoever
is added to any of their food, not even their butter.

• 263 Up until recent years the salt used by the people of
439 Hunza came from the Shimshal area, somewhere near
where the Shimshal River and the Muztagh join to-
gether. This salt is unrefined and used just as it is mined
from this mountain area. It obviously contains many
natural so-called impurities.

493 The only wheeled vehicles—two jeeps, in fact—are
owned and used by the Mir chiefly for bringing in
supplies, when road conditions permit. Therefore one
must walk for every chore. There is no motorized
377 equipment used in Hunza with the exception of the
electric light plant in the Mir's palace. Apart from what
401 I have mentioned here, mechanization of any sort is
unknown.

000 in the process of creating health and long life in Hunza!"

Here I have summarized my conclusions, which I believe account for the superior health, the unbounded energy and the long life of the Hunzans. Call it a set of rules if you like. I prefer to believe that it is the common sense way of life adopted by an intelligent people.

262 (1) Their food consists chiefly of natural fruits, grains and vegetables. Meat is eaten only on festive and other rare occasions. While grains—that is, the whole grains—are stored, they are ground for use in baking and gruel, only as required.

241 (2) Their soil is maintained by natural cultural practices. That which is taken from the soil is returned to the soil—both vegetable and animal.

461 (3) Most of the people of Hunza, including women and children, work daily in the fields. There is no Sabbath or weekly rest day, although there are religious holidays and festive days. Therefore, they work seven days a week . . . and in most cases, from dawn until darkness falls. Therefore, practically all the inhabitants of Hunza do their share of physical work. There are few, if any, completely sedentary occupations in Hunza.

262 (4) Very little fat of any kind is consumed by the people. The fats that are used consist of ghee, butter, apricot oil and negligible quantities of animal fats.

[241] (5) Complete absence of foreign additives. Nothing whatsoever is added to either the soil or the food of the people or the animals.

● 263 (6) Natural, unrefined salt was used by the people up until a few years ago . . . and this was an important factor in maintaining their health.

241 (7) No sprays or spray materials of any kind are used on their crops, and no unnatural chemical fer-

value to the people of Hunza? Let's examine them. 000

Let's start with pasteurization. Well, it would be very 744
difficult to pasteurize in Hunza. First of all, they don't
have the means of providing the required heat. Besides,
they don't suffer from any conditions which pasteuriza-
tion would cure—if it does cure anything.

How about hospitalization? Well, they have a com- 743
paratively new, modern hospital in Aliabad, but the
people don't use it very much. They distrust the hospital
and they distrust the doctor, even though he is a fine
capable fellow. Besides, I did not notice, particularly,
any sick or ailing people sitting around, waiting for a
hospital bed.

Then how about inoculations? To begin with, what 751
would you inoculate them against? They don't seem to 164
have many, if any, of our diseases. Then, too, there are
no inoculations against cancer, diabetes, heart disease,
arthritis and such, anyway. Oh, yes . . . besides, these
diseases have never been known in Hunza . . . not even
poliomyelitis.

The Mir has a huge medicine chest that was given 757
to him by the German expedition, which was stationed 177
across the river in Nagir. Yes, it did prove most useful 123
—for it helped a man get well. However, I must admit
rather dejectedly that the man the medicine chest
helped was my companion and not a citizen of Hunza.

They could use a dentist and right here you have 759
struck gold! However, it would be most difficult to get 164
a dentist to set up shop in Hunza, unless he were given
room in the Mir's residence, for that's the only place
where electric power is provided . . . unless the dentist
didn't mind going back to the old days when the old
foot pedal was used for power.

But let's be realistic about it! Wouldn't it be much 263
better to give the people of Hunza back their old

759 natural salt, which was mined at the confluence of the
164 Mustagh and Shimshal Rivers? Then a dentist wouldn't
● 263 be necessary. I trust you will pardon me if, here and
there, as the situation demands, I become my own
interrogator.

000 So after all is examined and said and done, how can
the Western world help the people of Hunza?

If you asked me this question, I wouldn't want to
answer it openly or boldly. But if you pressed me, re-
luctantly I'd say that the greatest contribution that the
West can make to Hunza, or to their good health and
longevity, is to stay away. Leave Hunza alone!

Somebody asked me if I would like to live in Hunza.
In some respects, that is an unfair question.

It's like this. The climate of California is considered
to be the most salubrious and pleasant in all of the
United States. Well, why don't all the people of the
United States move to California? Economic reasons?
That might be a factor . . . but not a very important
one. There are other considerations, too, I guess. But
basically, everyone doesn't want to live in California—
even if it has the most wonderful climate and they have
sunshine all the time.

I'd love to go back to Hunza and spend a few more
weeks there . . . and if I had been born in Hunza, I'm
sure I'd never want to leave the place. But I doubt if,
at my age, I'd be able to adjust myself to a change as
drastic as the one I would have to meet in Hunza. After
all, I am a product of Western civilization—whatever
that is.

"Do you think conditions would be too difficult for
you in Hunza?"

I believe a young, normal, healthy, strong individual
of sound mind could adjust himself to the conditions of
Hunza without too much trouble. I am not maintain-